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CultureBlocks: Bringing Arts & Culture into the Urban Policy Mix

Mark J. Stern  
University of Pennsylvania, stern@sp2.upenn.edu

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During the fall of 2013, the SIAP team gave presentations on CultureBlocks and the Philadelphia research in several forums, notably:

- Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts (NOCD-NY) researcher convening, New York City, September 12, 2013, on "Valuing the intersection between arts, culture, and community: An exchange of research and practice."
- Social Theory, Politics & the Arts October 2013 conference at Seattle University on the theme of "Arts & Culture: Creating Community in a High Tech World." Penn joined a research team from Drexel University, Westphal College of Media Arts & Design, on a Philadelphia panel called "Creativity and culture in community-based research."

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Abstract
This presentation was prepared for the Grantmakers in the Arts 2013 conference on "The NEW Creative Community" held October 6th-9th in Philadelphia. The CultureBlocks panel discussion was organized by Moira Baylson, Deputy Cultural Officer of the Philadelphia Office of Arts Culture and the Creative Economy, with Mark Stern, University of Pennsylvania. Stern's talk focused on use of CultureBlocks--as a data tool, a research tool, and a policy tool--to integrate the arts and culture into urban policy-making.

Disciplines
Arts and Humanities | Public Policy | Social Welfare | Urban Studies and Planning

Comments
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CultureBlocks: Bringing Arts & Culture into the Urban Policy Mix

Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP)
October 2013
Connecting the arts to urban public policy

- Data: detailed evidence & change over time
- Placing the arts in space & place
- How does the urban context influence the arts & culture
- How do the arts & culture influence other dimensions of urban life

CultureBlocks widens the circle of individuals & organizations who can address these issues.
Data: detailed evidence & change over time

CultureBlocks is driven by a set of databases that SIAP has developed over the past two decades

- Nonprofit, including informal & emerging groups
- Commercial cultural firms
- Resident artists
- Cultural participants
Measuring change over time in the cultural ecosystem

SIAP was able to link arts organizations between 1997 and 2011 to calculate a “mortality” rate. Cultural nonprofits disappeared at much higher rates in parts of West and North Philadelphia than in neighborhoods around Center City.
The cultural sector is not just individuals & organizations. The clustering of cultural resources—what we call its **cultural ecology**—has a strong influence on the internal structure of art worlds & their impact on neighborhoods & regions. **“Natural” cultural districts** are critical to the arts’ social impact.
Urban context influences the arts & culture:

Social diversity provides fertile soil in which the arts & culture can flourish.

Our cities are becoming more economically, ethnically, & household diverse
Urban context influences the arts & culture

The explosion of economic inequality is reinforcing the image of the arts as an elite sector.

Socio-economic status’ correlation with cultural indicators nearly doubled between 1997 & 2011
Districts can be differentiated by their cultural vitality in light of the economic & location advantages they enjoy. We’re particularly interested in civic cluster that overcome these barriers in fostering cultural engagement.
We’ve discovered that these civic clusters in low-income neighborhoods tended to decline in significance between 1997 & 2011, a result of neglect by funders & internal developments within the cultural sector.
Impacts: the capabilities approach

- Assumption: Well-being is the opportunity to live a life that one has reason to value
- Key: Wellbeing = freedom to choose how you live + the concrete opportunities to make choices.
- Can we measure this at the census tract level?
Impacts: Dimensions of social wellbeing

- **Economic wellbeing**: income, educational attainment, labor force engagement
- **Economic diversity**: income differences within tract
- **Institutional connection**: presence of nonprofits, community gardens
- **Face-to-face connection**: sense of belonging, trust, participation in neighborhood organizations
- **Housing**: housing cost burden, foreclosures, violations
- **Effective schools**: school performance measures
- **Security**: crime, ethnic & racial harassment
- **Environmental amenities**: parks, heat vulnerability
- **Morbidity**: chronic illness, hypertension, obesity
- **Health care access**: insurance, ER utilization
- **Birth outcomes/homicide**: prenatal care, low weight at birth, death by homicide, child welfare cases
- **Political voice**: voting

Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress” (2009)
Economic wellbeing often dictates other dimensions of wellbeing
Two dimensions of well-being: economic resources & social connection

Social connections & culture can be seen as mediating influences, important resources in neighborhoods with high poverty & low income.

Yet, many African American & Latino neighborhoods in Philadelphia have concentrated disadvantage because they are weak on both dimensions.
We’re working on measuring “heat vulnerability” using socio-economic & satellite imagery.

This map uses block-level readings from Landsat V to measure thermal radiation on a really hot day.
Morbidity uses health survey data on chronic conditions, diabetes, obesity, & hypertension to estimate health risks.
Using cluster analysis, we’ve identified concentrations of advantage & disadvantage, as well as sections of the city that have both strengths & weaknesses.
Three lessons for policy:
#1—Good data means policy can be guided by both values & evidence.
#2. Take space & place into consideration in making funding decisions

The increasing *marketization* of nonprofits has led many funders to stress organizational strength & to ignore the significant hurdles that community arts programs must overcome.

As a result some civic clusters are being starved to death.
#3—We are all policymakers

- Top-down models of policymaking no longer describe cities’ realities.
- This is bad news to the extent that government no longer has the fiscal capacity to call the shots, but . . .
- This is good news in that it reduces the gap between policy & practice.
- Practitioners—artists, community activists, and funders—need to better understand how their decisions can influence how policy & funding decisions are implemented.